Integration, Forms of Communication, and Development: Centre-Periphery Relations in Ireland, Past and Present*

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Introduction

The analytical problem of the relationship between centre and periphery can be studied in terms of integration. Integration is the process through which communication increases between the centre and other parts of the society. Centre is usually described as the (geographical) place, the city, where the country's government is located; the rest of the society is then the periphery. Several authors have developed typologies of phases or stages of integration for human societies, and therewith for their development.¹ Many of these typologies are based on the forms of communication between centre and periphery. They range from a stage where centre and periphery communicate with each other informally through face-to-face contacts, to highly developed and integrated societies where a strongly developed centre influences the lives of the citizens through a widely ramified bureaucratic system.

What many of these typologies have in common is that they are centre-biased or centre-oriented. By this I mean that they study integration as a process in which the centre, as the locus of power, initiates and dictates the forms of communication between itself and the periphery, and they look upon the periphery as an amorphous and powerless entity, slavishly following the directions of its centre. Such a viewpoint blurs the actual situation, for the periphery is certainly not a complete amorphous and powerless entity. An unequal division of power exists between them (per definition) but both have power. Forces may be at work in the periphery which are a resistance to its centre's intentions. Therefore, a thorough study of the characteristics of both the centre and the periphery is necessary for a better understanding of the process of integration. Moreover, this centre-oriented view seems to neglect the fact that integration is a two-way process, between at least two parties. On the one hand, the centre infiltrates into the periphery and tries to influence the lives of the population there directly. The other side of the process is that the periphery makes more direct use of the communication channels created by its centre. These two aspects of the process must be studied separately, for they need not go hand in hand. A centre may well increase its direct influence on the periphery through an ever widening formal system of bureaucratic organization, whereas the latter continues to communicate with its centre through informal, face-to-face contacts. In terms of societal development this means that a particular

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¹ Redfield, 1941; 1953; Park Redfield, 1962; Eisenstadt, 1966; Etzioni, 1968; Service, 1962, to mention but a few.
society can be classified as developed when the centre communicates with its periphery through a sophisticated bureaucratic system, and as underdeveloped when the periphery communicates with the centre by means of informal personal networks.

The above mentioned centre-biased view is reflected in many studies on brokerage and similar phenomena. A broker is a person who brings about communication, either directly or indirectly, between two or more entities who are located at different points in the power hierarchy. Brokerage is generally considered as an informal integration mechanism, characteristic of less developed societies, where centre and periphery are integrated insufficiently. Thus, the existence of brokerage is explained in terms of a defective formal institutional integration of centre and periphery. In line with this argument is the notion that brokerage will disappear, or play only a minor role, with increasing centralization and expansion of the bureaucratic apparatus. We find this reasoning by many authors. Roughly they argue as follows: When the centre plants out its bureaucratic units throughout the periphery, it thereby creates the channels for the periphery to communicate directly with its centre... and thus the population itself will make use of these channels.

In the following pages I illustrate and explain for Ireland that this is a false assumption. In that country an increasing centralization and bureaucratization has not led to a decrease of brokerage; indeed, the phenomenon is increasing. With this illustration I want to emphasize, more generally, the necessity of studying integration as a process in which two parties are involved, the centre and the periphery; each has its own powerbase and each determines to a considerable extent how it will communicate with the other.

Bureaucracy and brokerage past and present

Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Ireland was characterized by a rigid social dichotomy. A small upper stratum of English and Anglo-Irish landlords, mainly Protestant, formed the political, administrative, and economic elite. The largest part of the population, consisting predominantly of Catholic peasants, rented small plots of land from this elite, often via land-agents, for many landlords lived in Dublin or England during a large part of the year.

The Ireland of those days can be characterised politically as segmented. Ireland’s political centre – after 1800 this became Westminster – was strongly established but interfered only incidentally with the lives of the predominantly rural population. Because of an only rudimentarily developed bureaucratic apparatus, the centre communicated mainly which its periphery through the land-

lords-politicians and some officials in charge of the maintenance of law and order. The influence of the various regional political centres on the periphery, however, was greater. Grand Juries were the main legal bodies, functioning on County level, and within its territory a number of Boards were in charge of public works and the care for the sick and the poor. The members of these bodies belonged predominantly to the landowning class. In many respects Juries and Boards were formally dependent upon the country’s political centre, but in fact they were their own masters.

The horizon of most of the population was limited and usually hardly reached farther than the parish. When contact with the central or regional authorities was needed invariably the peasant would go this patron, the landlord, or the latter’s agent but more often he went to his parish priest, who then contacted one of the persons mentioned above.

Thus, up to about the last quarter of the nineteenth century the relationship between centre and periphery was limited in size and scope, effective central control and a bureaucratic apparatus were small. Brokerage was the main institution that linked centre and periphery.

England began to reorganize its administrative system in the course of the last century. The impact of this reorganization was also felt in the British colony of Ireland; here it resulted in a steady expansion of the bureaucratic system.

The bureaucracy expanded explosively after 1922, when the larger part of Ireland became independent, and after World War II, when the Irish government introduced a large scale welfare policy.

A similar reorganization came about in the regional administrative sector where the situation had grown chaotically because of the ever increasing numbers of Boards with strongly overlapping tasks. One single form of regional government was set up, the County Council. In fact these councils were rather independent from the central government, and the councillors were engaged both in policy making and in implementation. Because of the rapidly expanding tasks of the County Council and the flourishing corruption, the central government began to interfere in the council’s affairs. It created a national system for the recruitment of the council’s administrative personnel and began

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3 Collins (1963: 23-6) describes the few tasks, limited in scope, of these Boards and their strongly charitable nature.
4 See Collins 1963 who also points to the smallness of the bureaucracies of Grand Juries and Boards.
5 The parish priest, as the only leader of the people, often functioned as votebroker between the population and the landlords. This role enabled him to influence the often strongly rivaling landlords to the benefit of his flock. Cf. Whyte, 1960.
6 Chubb (1971: 222) observes that the bureaucratic apparatus more than doubled in personnel between 1940 and 1965.
to check the council's policies. This interference has led to more uniformity in local policy making but at the same time it reduced the council's powers considerably.

Thus, since about 1875 the Irish political system has been characterized by an increasing centralization and bureaucratization.

This increasing infiltration into the lives of the population by the central bureaucracy has not led to a decrease of brokerage. A change in personnel has taken place: the landlords have been eliminated politically and replaced by ordinary Irish citizens, but today brokerage flourishes more than ever.9

The most important brokers of present-day Ireland are the politicians, the TDs and the MCCs.9 Officially their tasks consist of policy making and checking its implementation. Most of them, however, are mainly involved in and busy with small local and the personal affairs of their electors. Both TDs and MCCs are pre-eminently intermediaries between the bureaucracies of central and county government and their voters. Most of their time is consumed by letter writing for constituents, listening to their complaints and problems, and by making representations at the departmental offices.

**Why brokerage continues to exist**

Why does the periphery continue to make use of the informal communication mechanism of brokerage, while the centre increases its influence on the periphery through an ever expanding bureaucratic apparatus? Three factors can be mentioned, each reinforcing the other, namely a cultural one, the electoral system, and the nature of the relationship between brokers and bureaucrats. I deal with them in that order.

**The cultural factor** — A strong particularism is characteristic of the relations in all sectors of social life in Ireland, and goes hand in hand with a personalization of these relations.10 This is reflected in the often quoted saying: It's not what you know, it's who you know. An Irishman sees his world around him as a vast network of personal relations.11 It is through this network, and other

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9 The agrarian revolution, which came to an end at the turn of the century, resulted in the creation of a population of peasant-proprietors. The then already weakened class of landlords disappeared almost completely from the scene during the political revolution which came to an end in 1922. A number of them were eliminated, and many left their country and went to Northern Ireland or England.

9 TD is an abbreviation of the Irish word *Teachta Dála,* which means Member of Parliament; MCC means Member of a County Council. For a more detailed description of their tasks, see Bax 1970 and 1971.

10 Chubb (1963: 284) observes this too when he writes that ... 'the personal approach comes naturally to Irish people'. Cf. also Whyte 1966.

11 Although she does not use the same concept, Kane (1968) clearly illustrates the working of the same principle for the kindred in Country Donegal.
peoples networks, that he knows much about the world. He does not primarily know and consider England or America as we know them from newspaper, atlas, and geography books; for him each is a country where a brother, a sister, aunt or uncle lives and who writes and tells him about life there. He perceives persons not primarily in their formal roles, as bureaucrats, lawyers, company directors, but in the first place as friends, friends of friends, relatives of friends: persons who owe him or a close connection of his some favour. In other words in his view each person is, morally or otherwise, indebted to a number of other persons. When he needs something, for instance a better job in a factory, he will not go straight to the office concerned with these matters and apply for the job. He will select one or more persons from his personal network who are indebted to him, from whom he knows or thinks that they, or persons in their personal networks, have close personal contacts with the man who is in charge of the appointments.

The electoral system — This basic cultural trait of perceiving one's relations in particularistic terms of credit and debt may disappear with a country's increasing development, when people receive more education and begin to learn more about their (universalistic) rights and duties. Various factors, however, may form resistances to this change. In Ireland such a factor is the nature and functioning of the electoral system. Elsewhere I describe this system in detail thus some general remarks will suffice here. The system is known as proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote. It is conducted in multi-member districts. With this system the voter is given considerable power over the election of individual political candidates. He has one vote but with this single vote he can arrange his order of preferences and express these preferences on his ballot paper. It is he — and not the party executive — who decides that order. Thus, he primarily votes not for a party but for individual candidates. It will be evident that a fierce competition for voters exists in these multi-member districts between candidates of the same party. These candidates cannot compete with each other on differences in ideologies: they must do so by rendering as many services as possible to the electorate. Moreover, as ideological differences between the two main parties are hardly present, not only candidates from the same party but also from different parties compete in a similar way for the same voters.

Thus, there is an interplay between the working of the electoral system and the population's particularistic world view; the two reinforce one another. The population expects the politicians to act as brokers, and the electoral system reinforces these expectations, because it compels the latter to play this role.

Brokers and bureaucracy — The population’s particularism and the electoral system together, however, would not suffice for brokerage to remain; for that purpose three parties must work together; the broker, the ’prize consumer’ (the elector), and the ’prize producer’ (the bureaucracy). So far we have seen why broker and voter co-operate; now we must deal with the third in this triad and answer the important question: Why does the bureaucracy co-operate with the broker-politician? Much can be said to explain this and much depends on the particular circumstances.13 Today’s Irish politicians have no direct power over officials in matters of appointment, sacking, and promotion. For the higher, professional jobs this is done according to standardized procedures, by a state-appointed body, and via open competitive examinations. Where it concerns lower jobs, such as clerks, typists, and manual labourers, the head of the office has considerable freedom of choice. But despite these restrictions the politician can and does influence promotions, sackings and appointments. He does so by manipulating his own personal contacts.14 We must not forget that the bureaucrats are also bearers of the same particularistic culture and thus susceptible to the same sorts of pressures as the ordinary population. They also have personal networks.15 They will help a politician both to pay off their debts to him and to build up credit with him to ensure themselves, their relatives and friends of future services.

That personal background and pressures are of basic importance in this context, but also that much depends upon the particular circumstances, is illustrated in the following example. A vacancy occurred in a county sanatorium for a chief storekeeper. The assistant county manager of the district was in charge of selecting the applicants. A number of politicians came to him to make representations for their clients to get the job. They had all sorts of arguments: one politician made it clear to the assistant county manager that this client was a close relative of the bishop, another’s client was a very close friend and ‘boozing pal’ of the assistant county manager from the adjacent district. One politician who did not yet have much influence in the regional office hinted that one of his clients was the brother of the mother superior of the convent where the assistant county manager’s daughter was employed. Of all these connections and pressures the latter seems to have been the most important, because this applicant was selected.

13 I give a detailed analysis of the relationships between the politicians and the bureaucracy in my Harpsprings and Confessions. (forthcoming)
14 Elsewhere (Bax 1971) I give an extensive example of the way in which a politician influences the selection of a staff-officer, and how this politician makes use of the credit towards this officer for a client of his.
15 Cf. Boissevain (1968: 548) who writes: ’Though (a person’s) network may provide advance warning and protection, it also furnishes channels along which enemies can attack him.’ (italics mine, B.)
Summary and conclusions

I began my analysis with emphasizing the necessity of studying both centre and periphery when dealing with integration, for this is a two-way process in which both centre and periphery play their parts. Because of a centre-biased view, many studies on integration and development deal with the periphery as though it were a powerless entity. This is an incorrect view; resistances (i.e. power) in the periphery may cause that integration does not go according to the centre’s wishes. I illustrated for Ireland that brokerage can be such a resistance factor. With the introduction of a particular electoral system, Ireland's very centre provided the periphery with the power to consolidate a communication mechanism which is generally considered as archaic and a hindrance for development. Indeed, because of this electoral system the phenomenon of brokerage is growing in importance, for with the centre's general development policy ever more fields are created in which brokers can operate. These developments have resulted in two different forms of communication between Ireland's centre and periphery. The centre communicates with its periphery through an expanding formal system of bureaucratic organization, and the periphery continues to communicate with the centre through an informal system of brokerage. Therefore, we may conclude that a widespread idea, namely that brokerage is a result of a country's poor development, can also be reversed. Furthermore, we might predict that in a development bureaucracy of a strongly particularistic society (contrary to a traditional bureaucracy which is involved in the maintenance of law and order only) will cause brokerage to grow in importance; each new developing scheme provides the brokers with new grounds to cover.

My analysis of the Irish situation illustrates more in relation to the general concepts of centre and periphery. Centre is often described in sociological terms as a concentration of power, usually located in the city. When we apply this definition to Ireland we run into difficulties. For in the field I cover, the city is the sociological centre only if we focus our analysis on bureaucracy and government. In terms of political power, however, neither the city nor the towns where county government resides are centres; political power is dispersed over Ireland's geographical periphery. This may lead us to the rather absurd conclusion that there is no political centre. On the contrary, I would argue that there are as many political power centres in Ireland as there are politicians. Therefore, I suggest that we do away with the geographical connotation in the concept of centre, describe centre as any sociological situation where more power is concentrated (the periphery is then any situation with less power), and accept my point that those situations can be either uni-centric or poly-centric. Our next step to a fruitful analysis and detection of power centres in a society is then, that we study centres and peripheries in terms of specific institutional spheres and fields of activities. We may well then come to the
conclusion that in some fields there is only one centre, whereas in other fields there are more centres; we must explain these differences as well as the reasons why centres from one field do not coincide with centres in other fields. Again, with these suggestions I add an extra dimension to our general theme, namely that there is not only a field of tensions between centre and periphery but also between centres themselves.

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